

# Assessing the Forms of Abuse

## 1. Isolation

Isolating behavior keeps the victim dependent on her partner and alone without outside support or help. Isolating tactics include keeping the victim from going to a job, school, or church, or from seeing family and friends. This is accomplished by such means as the perpetrator removing the telephone while he is away from home, following the victim around, opening the victim's mail, and monitoring her phone calls. Note that isolation increases the danger to the victim. Listen to the client's story and ask some of the following questions to assess for isolation.

- a. Do you have a support system of friends in the community? Does your partner ever pressure you to stop seeing your friends?
- b. Does your partner ever forbid you to see or talk to certain people in your family?
- c. Has your partner restricted you in other ways from doing what you want?

## 2. Financial Control

Exercising financial control makes the victim dependent on the partner and extremely vulnerable to abuse. Examples include denying the victim access to money and to information about the family finances, forcing the victim to beg and plead for money, lying about money, stealing the victim's money, preventing the victim from working, and ruining the victim's credit. Listen to the client's story and ask some of the following questions to assess for financial abuse.

- a. What kinds of arguments do you have over money? Who makes the final decision when you disagree with each other?
- b. If you want to work, does your partner allow it?
- c. Do you have any money of your own to spend? How are finances handled? Who pays the bills? Who controls the checkbook?

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### 3. Intimidation and Threats

Intimidations and threats are used to make the victim fear that, if she does not comply, something terrible will happen. The fear can linger for days or weeks, long after an assault is over. Examples of this form of abuse include frightening the victim by certain gestures and looks, smashing things, destroying the victim's possessions, hurting or killing pets, playing with weapons to scare the victim, and threatening to kill the victim, the children, or to commit suicide. Many people who live in situations that are continuously threatening adjust and accommodate without realizing the extent to which they are living in fear. These questions are meant to open the discussion. The interviewer may have to probe to determine to what extent the victim is living with fear.

- a. How does your partner let you know that he disapproves of your behavior?
- b. When you have conflicts or arguments, are there ways that your partner scares you? What kinds of threats does your partner make?
- c. Does your partner ever use physical strength or weapons to intimidate you?
- d. Has your partner made veiled or open threats to kill you, the children, or himself?
- e. Are there certain subjects you don't bring up anymore?
- f. Has your partner intimidated or threatened you in other ways?

### 4. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse robs the victim of self-confidence and makes her feel subservient, dependent, and weak. Examples include putting the victim down, calling her names, humiliating her in front of family and friends, making her feel stupid, and blaming her for what the perpetrator did wrong. Listen to the client's story and ask some of the following questions to assess emotional abuse.

- a. When your partner wants to insult you, what names are you called? How often does your partner do this?
- b. Do you ever feel you just can't do anything right?
- c. Do you spend a lot of time trying to figure out how not to upset your partner?
- d. In what other ways does your partner hurt you emotionally? Are you put down or criticized?

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## 5. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is aimed at making the victim do what the perpetrator wants. It causes fear, or punishes the victim for breaking the perpetrator's rules. Examples include pushing, shoving, hitting with an open hand or a closed fist, choking, and burning. Listen to the client's story and ask some of the following questions to assess for physical abuse.

- a. Can you think of a time when your partner pushed or shoved you?
- b. Can you think of a time when your partner grabbed you or prevented you from leaving a room?
- c. Can you think of a time when your partner threw something at you or at a wall?
- d. Can you think of a time when your partner hit you with his hand or fist?
- e. Can you think of a time when your partner choked you?
- f. Has your partner abused you physically in other ways?

## 6. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is degrading and humiliating. Many victims feel very uncomfortable talking about sexual abuse. The practitioner must be able to inquire openly about the presence and nature of the abuse. Many women find that over a period of time, a man who is physically and psychologically abusive will frequently be forceful in sexual ways as well. Sexual abuse includes a broad range of behaviors, including pressuring the victim to have sex in a way or at a time she's not comfortable with. It might include things the perpetrator does to make the victim afraid for her own or her children's sense of sexual safety. Listen to the client's story and ask some of the following questions to assess for sexual abuse.

- a. Can you think of a time when your partner made you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about sex?
- b. Do you feel pressured to have sex?
- c. Are there ways your partner gets you to have sex if you don't want it?
- d. Are there other behaviors of your partner's that make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe sexually?

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## **7. Use of the Children to Control or Punish their Mother**

Often the man who batters threatens to harm the children as a way to make their mother comply with his demands. Children are also used in a number of other ways (e.g., as spies who are required to report to their father about their mother's whereabouts.) Children are sometimes forced to witness or participate in assaults against their mother and they often hear their father denigrate their mother. Some perpetrators constantly undermine the mother's authority with the children. Listen to the client's story and ask some of the following questions to assess these issues.

- a. Are there ways that your partner tries to use the children against you?
- b. Does your partner ever threaten that he will harm or snatch the children if you leave him?
- c. Do you ever feel your children must spy on you for their father or must side with their father to punish you?